

Defiant Students Keep the Underground Presses Rolling

By SETH S. KING

Student underground newspapers are spreading rapidly across college campuses, and into the nation's high schools, despite strong resistance from legal authorities and school officials.

Many students are risking suspension or expulsion by disturbed administrators as they produce and circulate the anti-establishment publications.

Some have even risked jail terms or fines in court actions brought by district attorneys who have accused them of publishing obscene literature.

The Liberation News Service, a radical news agency that considers itself the only "truthful alternative" to the "captive" national press, says that the number of these campus-related periodicals now publishing its dispatches has grown to 200. Government officials in Washington estimate that the number of such papers being published in secondary schools has risen to between 500 and 1,000.

A nationwide New York Times survey of 13 campuses and other sources shows that these underground papers vary widely in sophistication and content. The extent of their direct influence on students was difficult to measure. But in some instances, underground papers have captured a wider readership than the sanctioned college dailies, upon whom they are exerting pressure.

Most of them survive in the face of constant financial problems. Lacking help from their institutions, they are forced to rely heavily on street sales, contributions from staffers or radical organizations. But some carry advertising, much of which comes from recording companies and sellers of off-beat clothing.

Nothing Worth Reading

While many of them concentrate on local issues or serve as the information medium for student strike actions, most also carry scathing attacks on the nation's war and racial policies shortcomings of the antipoverty programs, and strident accounts of alleged failures by local and national government.

Most are avowedly organs of the New Left. But in California, the United California Students for an Academic Environment, a counterradical group, has started a paper called The Open Campus, which is distributed on 39 campuses throughout the state.

"Our aim is to state political happenings and supplement them with editorial comment," said Steven Diaz, director of the organization. "We started basically because there isn't a college campus paper in the state that is worth reading. We hope to influence boards of trustees as well as student body elections."

The Harpoon, which has appeared recently at the University of Houston as an off-campus publication, explained in its first editorial why it was publishing:

"The Daily Cougar [the official student daily] has become smug, sluggish and complacent in its old age; we hope to drag it kicking and screaming out of its stagnation," the editorial declared.

Many of the papers have fallen into trouble, almost from the outset, either with university authorities or with legal officers. Part of this is caused by their expressions of defiance of authority, publication of scatological drawings and the liberal use of four-letter words.

At Pennsylvania State University, The Water Tunnel, which appeared in January as an underground paper, was banned from the campus two hours later. Four students were subsequently arrested by the local police on charges of circulating obscene literature.

The charges were later dropped against two of them. The other two were tried. Their trial ended in a hung jury and a second trial has been scheduled for next month.

The attempt to ban The Water Tunnel touched off Penn State's first student protest in many years. It also forced the university's policymaking Senate into its first emergency session to debate the student arrests.

At Grinnell College in Grinnell, Iowa, once considered one of the more conservative liberal arts colleges in the Middle West, the state Attorney General seized copies of Pterodactyl, an off-campus publication that champions the New Left but prints almost anything—including articles contributed by conservative writers.

The editors sued the Attorney General for \$11,000, which they figured was the cost of the confiscated papers. A Federal Court judge ruled that the seizure on the grounds of obscenity was illegal. But the court refused to grant the \$11,000. The paper has resumed publication.

Other underground papers have delighted in joining the battle against university officials who have tried to prevent their sale on campuses or ban them entirely.

At the University of Texas in Austin, a group of students known as the Radical Media Project has been publishing The Rag, a political underground paper, and is now preparing to publish The Mushroom. The Mushroom, one of its editors who preferred to be known only as "George" explained, will be "cultural instead of political," containing mostly essays and commentary of the New Left.

The University of Texas has a rule against commercial solicitations on the campus. But student supporters of The Rag have challenged the rule by selling it on the steps of the Student Union. University officials have not yet made an issue of the distribution.

The Rag, like many of the other underground publications, has had trouble raising funds, and sometimes in finding someone willing to print it. But student interest in the paper has risen sharply.

Some university-sponsored student papers are also becoming more radical. The News, a Boston University paper, published an edition last November containing photographs of a couple in positions of sexual intercourse as a protest against dormitory visiting hours. The hours were subsequently liberalized.

The underground papers appear to have flourished most at universities where students believe the official campus daily has been curbed or influenced by officials. In some instances, the off-campus publications have taken the official student papers along with them in their crusades.

Broadening the Scope

At the University of Texas, The Rag was joined by The Daily Texan in a campaign against poor facilities in the Student Union. Their efforts resulted in a number of changes during the Christmas holidays.

While most of the underground periodicals concentrate on local student issues, many devote part of their limited space to slashing attacks on the nation's war and anti-poverty policies.

One of the largest and most sophisticated of them, The Old Mole, has attracted national attention during the recent student strike there by publishing parts of the univer-

The Old Mole also offered documentary evidence that it said supported its claim that university officials were trying to circumvent a faculty vote to end campus credits for Reserve Officers Training Corps courses.

Some Sort of Communication

The Old Mole, which calls itself a journal of revolution, carries on its editorial page a quotation from Karl Marx that explains its title—"We recognize our old friend, our Old Mole, who knows so well how to work underground, suddenly to appear: the Revolution."

Many of the off-campus periodicals also devote space to Negro student affairs. At San Francisco State College, the Black Students Union has started Black Fire, its own bi-monthly journal.

"We needed some sort of communication going to students and community to represent our views, so we started a revolutionary paper on the order of the Black Panther paper," explained Vernon Smith, coordinator and editor of Black Fire.

One of the most ambitious of the unofficial college papers is The Metro, an independent weekly edited and distributed by students at Wayne State University in Detroit.

The Metro, which was started as an entertainment-oriented paper for students in southeastern Michigan, now has a press run of 40,000 copies and is distributed at 18 college campuses and in 10 high schools. Its revenue comes largely from advertising.

Last year, the university complained that Metro staffers were using typewriters and telephones of South End, the official college publication. This, they contended, was a conflict of interest.

The university tried to join the paper from publishing and then tried to ban South End staffers from working on The Metro. After losing a court suit, the school tried to get the University Publications Committee to bar the paper. This also failed.

The Metro has now become more political in content and is publishing throughout the summer.

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